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## Florence County and Charter Communications partnering to bring broadband to whole county

**Matthew Christian**

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FLORENCE, S.C. – Florence County and Charter are partnering to connect the whole county to broadband.

The Florence County Council recently voted unanimously to approve a contract with Spectrum Southeast LLC, a Charter subsidiary, to provide broadband to approximately 3,320 addresses in the county by the beginning of 2024.

Florence County will provide \$4.5 million of its American Rescue Plan funds for the \$13.8 million project.

The American Rescue Plan is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package geared toward helping the country to continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the government shutdowns initiated to slow the spread of the virus. It was signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 11.

Included in the plan was \$350 billion for state and local governments. Of that money, \$195.3 billion goes to states and Washington, D.C., \$65.1 billion goes to counties, \$45.6 billion to cities, \$20 billion to tribal governments, \$19.5 billion to non-entitlement units of local government and \$4.5 billion to the territories.

Florence County will receive \$26.86 million, according to information on the United States Department of the Treasury's website.

Spectrum Southeast, the Charter subsidiary, will provide the remaining \$9.3 million.

The contract contains clauses for what happens if the number of addresses to be connected exceeds the estimated 3,320. It indicates that the additional addresses will be connected at a rate of \$1,355 per address.

As such, the county will allocate an additional \$1.5 million in American Rescue Plan funds for potential additional addresses.

If the number of addresses is below the estimate, the cost to connect will be reduced by \$1,355 for each address below the estimate.

Rusty Smith, Florence County administrator, told the council that the project is part of a larger \$20 million effort from the company to connect the remainder of the county to broadband.

"I feel certain that this will expand our information highway exponentially," Smith said at a recent meeting.

Willard Dorriety Jr., Florence County Council chairman, said he hoped this would make Florence the first in the state with comprehensive broadband.

Councilman Roger Poston said the project would be big for the rural areas of the county. He added that the COVID-19 pandemic showed that children in rural areas needed access to broadband to complete online school work.

Councilman Jason Springs added that it was important to get started quickly due to potential material and labor shortages when other counties try to connect themselves to broadband.

Poston and Springs both thanked state Rep. Roger Kirby for his efforts with the project.

**By Matthew Christian**

**Government and Politics Reporter**

I cover the city of Florence, the county of Florence, the state legislative delegation of Florence County and surrounding areas, and the federal delegation representing the Pee Dee for the Morning News.